Four Pivotal Steps Needed to End AIDS in Children by 2030 [VIDEO]

A new global alliance launches to end AIDS in children by 2030. Currently, only half of children with HIV are on lifesaving treatment.

August 3, 2022 By Trent Straube

Here's a heartbreaking disparity in the AIDS response: Globally, only half (52%) of children living with HIV are on lifesaving meds, compared with 76% of adults. This means that nearly 1.2 million children and adolescents ages 0 to 19 have untreated HIV. To address this issue, several international AIDS organizations have joined a new effort to provide HIV care and treatment for children. Specifically, they launched the Global Alliance for Ending AIDS in Children by 2030.

The initiative, which builds on previous efforts, was announced during the International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2022), which was held July 29 to August 2 in Montreal. Stakeholders in the alliance include the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, the U.S. Presidents Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and other partners, according to a UNAIDS press release.

> Globally, only half of children living with HIV are on life-saving treatment.
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> UNAIDS, @UNICEF and @WHO have brought together a new alliance to fix one of the most glaring disparities in the AIDS response.
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> — UNAIDS (@UNAIDS) August 3, 2022

What's more, the first phase of the alliance focuses on 12 countries that have joined the effort:

Angola, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

According to UNAIDS, the alliance has identified four main pillars for collective action:

1. Closing the treatment gap for pregnant and breastfeeding adolescent girls and women living with HIV and optimizing continuity of treatment;

2. Preventing and detecting new HIV infections among pregnant and breastfeeding adolescent girls and women;

3. Accessible testing, optimized treatment and comprehensive care for infants, children and adolescents exposed to and living with HIV; and

4. Addressing rights, gender equality and the social and structural barriers that hinder access to services.

"To succeed, we need a healthy, informed generation of young people who feel free to talk about HIV and to get the services and support they need to protect themselves and their children from HIV," said Limpho Nteko, a mother from Lethko who addressed AIDS 2022, recounting how she learned of her HIV status when she was 21 and pregnant with her first child. Ntkeo then became an advocate for other African women and families through the mothers2mothers program.

That women-led program, she said, "has achieved virtual elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV for our enrolled clients for eight consecutive years—showing what is possible when we let women and communities create solutions tailored to their realities."

You can read and download the free 16-page report The Global Alliance to End AIDS in Children: A Global Strategic Initiative to End AIDS in Children by 2030. The report explains the reasons a new and updated alliance is needed:

> There has been remarkable progress in some countries in providing antiretroviral therapy (ART) to pregnant women living with HIV. By the end of 2021, 12 countries in sub-Saharan Africa reached the target of 95% ART coverage in pregnant women; and Botswana was the first high prevalence African country to be validated as being on the path to eliminating vertical transmission of HIV.
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> At the global level, however, we are far from ending new HIV infections in children. There are HIV high burden countries and settings where progress in preventing vertical transmission has flatlined. In addition, challenges with the quality of care persist, with poor uptake of testing, gaps in ART initiation, low retention rates and poor adherence to HIV treatment. The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown us further off track – between 2019 and 2021, ART coverage among pregnant and breastfeeding women declined in some countries.

In related news, as AIDS 2022 kicked off last week, UNAIDS released a report warning that the world was missing its targets to reduce HIV. For more, read "Stalled Progress on HIV Leaves Millions in Danger."

And click #AIDS 2022 for a collection of breaking news and research from the conference, including the announcement that another man appeared to be cured of HIV after a stem cell transplant and data showing that racial disparities in PrEP, pre-exposure prophylaxis, to prevent HIV are growing worse.

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